

**DETERMINANTS OF ADJUSTMENT AMONG MALAYSIAN  
REPATRIATES**

by

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## DEDICATION

*My beloved husband, Zikri Muhammad*

*Son, Muhammad Faris Ezany bin Zikri*

*My beloved parents,*

*En. Mohd. Yusoff bin Che Ahmad*

*Pn. Khatijah binti Mohd. Yusoff*

*My beloved parents-in-law,*

*En. Haji Muhammad bin Isa*

*Pn. Raja Sapiah binti Raja Deraman*

*My beloved brothers, sisters, in-laws and colleagues*

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## **ABSTRAK**

Penyesuaian repatriat dikaji secara meluas terutamanya di Amerika, Finland, dan Jepun. Kajian yang dijalankan kebanyakannya tertumpu pada punca-punca dan kesan daripada penyesuaian repatriat. Kajian terbaru ini ingin memperkayakan lagi bahan-bahan rujukan berkaitan repatriat di Malaysia. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan sama ada pembolehubah individu (keyakinan diri), pembolehubah kerja (kejelasan peranan, konflik peranan, pertimbangan peranan, dan perbezaan peranan), pembolehubah organisasi (sokongan social), dan pembolehubah bukan kerja (perbezaan budaya) memberi kesan terhadap tiga dimensi penyesuaian iaitu psikologi yang sihat, penyesuaian sosio budaya, dan penyesuaian kerja. Data telah dikutip daripada 104 repatriat Malaysia. Empat hipotesis utama telah dibentangkan bagi mencapai objektif kajian ini. Dalam menentukan hubungan antara pembolehubah individu dengan penyesuaian repatriat, kajian telah membuktikan bahawa keyakinan diri luaran (external self-efficacy) mempengaruhi psikologi yang sihat dan penyesuaian kerja. Konflik peranan menunjukkan hubungan negatif yang signifikan dengan psikologi yang sihat. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini gagal membuktikan hipotesis pembolehubah organisasi ke atas kesan penyesuaian repatriat. Bagi pembolehubah bukan kerja, didapati bahawa hanya perbezaan budaya—komponen asas, mempunyai hubungan signifikan yang negatif dengan psikologi yang sihat. Penemuan ini menekankan bahawa repatriat Malaysia perlu meningkatkan keyakinan diri, mengurangkan konflik peranan di tempat kerja dan juga perbezaan budaya adalah melalui penerangan kerja melalui latihan, mewujudkan hubungan penasihat, dan pada masa yang sama repatriat perlu berkomunikasi dengan organisasi di negara sendiri semasa mereka bekerja di luar negara.

## **ABSTRACT**

Repatriates' adjustment is widely researched particularly in America, Finland, and Japan. A growing body of research has been carried out to study on its determinants and outcomes. The present study intended to contribute to the Malaysian literature pertaining to this subject. The purpose of the present study is to determine the impact of individual variable (self-efficacy), job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty), organizational variable (social support), and non-work variable (culture novelty) on three dimensions of repatriates' adjustment (psychological well-being, socio-cultural re-adjustment, and work re-adjustment). Data were collected from 104 Malaysian repatriates. Four main hypotheses were formulated in order to achieve objectives of the study. In examining the relationship between individual variable and repatriates' adjustment, it was found that external self-efficacy impacted on psychological well-being and work re-adjustment. In the relationship between job variables with repatriates' adjustment, only role conflict showed a negative significant relationship with psychological well-being. However, the present study was not able to support the relationship between organizational variable and repatriates' adjustment. For the non-work variable, it was found that only culture novelty—basic elements, had a negative significant relationship with psychological well-being. The findings highlight that Malaysian repatriates need to develop high self-efficacy, reduce role conflict at work, and culture novelty by clarifying their jobs through technical training, establishing mentor relationships, and at the same time keeping in touch with companies in home country during their international assignment.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The internationalization and globalization process of the past decades have resulted in increased mobility of human resources. Increases in the number of employees who spend some part of their working lives overseas have been noticed for the last decades (Linehan & Scullion, 2002a; Gregersen, Black, & Morrison, 1998). Historically, companies have sent managers to live and work overseas for many reasons which depend primarily on the level of globalization of their industry and the companies' specific business strategy. Black and Gregersen (1999) listed a number of reasons for companies to send employees overseas: to open new markets, to facilitate a merger or acquisition, to set up new technologies and systems, and to generate innovative ideas. In addition, Black and Gregersen (1999) highlighted that 80% of midsize and large American companies send personnel overseas and 45% plan to increase the number of employees they have on assignment. Employees who are sent by the company to live and work overseas are known as expatriate (Ali, 2003; Adler, 1991). Expatriates must often function in significantly different political, economic, and cultural background (Andreason, 2003).

On the other hand, the final step in the expatriation cycle, that is, repatriation process has received relatively little systematic exploration (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002; Forster, 1994; Brewster & Scullion, 1997; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Tung, 1998; Riusala & Suutari, 2000; Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001). Repatriation, or re-entry to home country, is the movement from a foreign country back to one's own

country after living overseas for a significant period of time (Hurn, 1999) for the purposes of studying or working (Hunt & Bolon, 1998).

MacDonald and Arthur (2001) mentioned that poor repatriation practice reflects significant human resource management problems. In addition, poor repatriation practice is costly (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992b), restricts the effective utilization of employees (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Adler, 1991), and often results in to the loss of valued personnel (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Black & Gregersen, 1991). Findings from research conducted by Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992a) indicated that 60% of American, 80% of Japanese, and 71% of Finnish expatriates experienced culture shock during repatriation (Hammer, Hart, & Rogan, 1998).

Reviewed by Adler (1991) summarized results from a number of research which indicate that: (1) one out of every five employees who finished an overseas assignment has the ideas of leaving the company, (2) less than half of returned expatriate managers receive promotions upon returning in spite of the fact that they have worked years in the overseas operation, (3) two-thirds of returned expatriates feel that their overseas assignment have negative impacts on their careers, and (4) approximately 50% of returned expatriates feel that their re-entry positions are less satisfying than their international assignments. In addition, an average of one quarter of repatriates leave their companies and join competitors within one year of returning home, which is double the number of managers who do not go overseas (Black & Gregersen, 1999).

In conclusion, the above discussion indicates that it is important to ensure that repatriates adjust successfully in their home country. Many parties will be affected if

repatriates failed to adjust to their work. Thus, the present study proposes to identify determinants that influence repatriates' adjustment to their home country.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Traditionally, the focus of previous research has been on the issues of predeparture selection and training, and on adjustment and management of expatriates while they were abroad (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002). Many multinational companies (MNCs) often send their managers and executives internationally in an attempt to develop their knowledge of international economic environment and their ability to work and manage effectively across national borders (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2000; Tung, 1998). International assignments usually last from two to five years and during this period, international managers are often "out of sight, out of mind" of their parent companies (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Hammer et al., 1998).

There was a lot of literature on the adjustment to foreign cultures. However, there was little awareness of re-entry difficulties faced by employees returning home (Black et al., 1992b). Reviewed by MacDonald and Arthur (2001), repatriation was mentioned as the least carefully considered phase of global assignments, both in research and in organizational practices. While away from one home country, it is easy to lose touch with the vast array of social, political, economic, and other changes that have occurred during an extended absence (Hunt & Bolon, 1998). In addition, (Hunt & Bolon, 1998) highlighted that repatriates often return home only to be "reverse culture shock" by all changes to their memories of their home country. Investigations of cross-cultural transition and the process of repatriation must keep pace with growing demands for an international workforce (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Arthur, 2001).

The number of both theoretical papers (Feldman, 1991; Black et al., 1992b) and empirical studies (Black, 1994; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002) on repatriates' adjustment is lacking if compared with the extensive of studies on expatriate adjustment. In addition, empirical studies of repatriation have largely sampled American executives and managers (Harvey, 1989; Hammer et al., 1998; Black, 1992), Finnish repatriates (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002), Japanese repatriates (Black, 1994; Gregersen & Black, 1996), and there was one study sampling repatriates of 26 different countries (Feldman, Tompson, & Holly, 1993).

Understanding the determinants of repatriates' adjustment is important. There are many determinants that have been identified as important to repatriates' adjustment. The present study has selected self-efficacy, role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, role novelty, social support, and culture novelty to be examined as determinants of repatriates' adjustment.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Objectives**

The literature on repatriation is mostly conducted by researchers overseas with the focus on its antecedents variables (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen, 1992; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Hammer et al., 1998; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002) as well as the repatriation adjustment and its outcomes (Gregersen, 1992; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Hammer et al., 1998). The aim of the present study is to look at the determinants of repatriate' adjustment among Malaysian repatriates who have worked overseas and now working for manufacturing firms in Penang.

The present study is aimed at addressing the following questions:

- (1) Is there any significant relationship between self-efficacy and repatriates' adjustment?



- (2) What is the impact of job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) to repatriates' adjustment?
- (3) How does social support relate to repatriates' adjustment?
- (4) To what extent does culture novelty effect repatriates' adjustment?

In order to answer these above research questions, the objectives of the present study are:

- (1) To investigate whether self-efficacy is related to repatriates' adjustment.
- (2) To examine whether job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) are related to repatriates' adjustment.
- (3) To study whether social support is related to repatriates' adjustment.
- (4) To investigate whether culture novelty is related to repatriates' adjustment.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Present Study**

The present study is to examine the influence of individual variable (self-efficacy), job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty), organizational variable (social support), and non-work variable (culture novelty) on repatriates' adjustment among Malaysian repatriates in manufacturing firms. The findings from the present research may benefit international companies to provide sufficient support to them, present and future repatriates.

Besides, literature in repatriates' adjustment is lacking. Only a few studies were conducted in this topic. For examples, Feldman (1991) and Black et al. (1992b) carried out theoretical studies, while Gregersen and Stroh (1997) and Suutari and Valimaa (2002) carried out empirical studies in the repatriates' adjustment topic. Thus, the present study fills the gap in repatriates' adjustment issue. In addition, to the

knowledge of the researcher, this is the first empirical study being carried out in the Malaysian context.

Lastly, the result of this study also will provide ideas and practical suggestions, which international companies can implement to improve their repatriation programs and policies. It is hoped that this findings will be able to help repatriates recognize the factors affecting their adjustment to their home country.

## **1.5 Definitions of Key Variables**

**Repatriates' adjustment** is defined as re-adaptation and re-adjustment to the living of home country after working and living in overseas for a period of time (Hurn, 1999; Torbiorn, 1982; Black & Stephens, 1989; Black, 1990; Feldman et al., 1993).

Three dimensions of repatriates' adjustment will be included in the present study:

- (1) **Psychological well-being** refers to internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction (Ali, 2003; Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999).
- (2) **Socio-cultural re-adjustment** refers to external psychological outcomes that link individuals to their new context such as the ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of family life, work, and school (Ali, 2003; Segall et al., 1999).
- (3) Gregersen and Black (1990) defined **work re-adjustment** as the degree of psychological comfort that a person feels in the new situation.

There are seven different independent variables that will be examined in the present study. They are self-efficacy, role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, role

novelty, social support, and culture novelty. The seven variables will be defined as follows:

**Self-efficacy** is defined as the degree to which the individual believes he or she can successfully execute a particular behavior (Bandura, 1977).

**Role clarity** concerns with the extent to which an individual knows what is expected of him/her on the job (Black et al., 1992b).

**Role conflict** refers to conflicting signals about what is expected of the individual in the new work role (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970).

**Role discretion** is the extent to which an individual has the opportunity to improve his or her role in order to create a more familiar, predictable, and controllable role to facilitate the transition (Feldman & Brett, 1983; Black, 1988; Black et al., 1992b).

**Role novelty** is defined as the difference between the past and the new roles (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002).

**Social support** is defined as “an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider on the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient” (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984 as cited in Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003, p.55).

**Culture novelty** is the dissimilarity between the home country and the host country from which the expatriate is returning (Black & Gregersen 1991).

## **1.6 Organization of Chapters**

Chapter 1 renders an overview of the present study. The purpose and the research objectives have been put forth to steer the direction of the present study. The importance of the present study is addressed to provide readers the rationale of conducting the study.

In Chapter 2, literature review on the dependent variable and the independent variables are presented. It forms the backbone of the present study and helps to develop the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 illustrates the methodology applied in the present study which encompasses the sample collected, measurements, and the statistical analyses. Next, Chapter 4 presents the results of the statistical analysis for the data collected and the findings encapsulated from the analyses.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides discussions and implications of the present study's findings. It also highlights the limitations of the present study and proposes some suggestions for future research. Lastly, conclusions will be penned to wrap up this research.

## **Chapter 2**

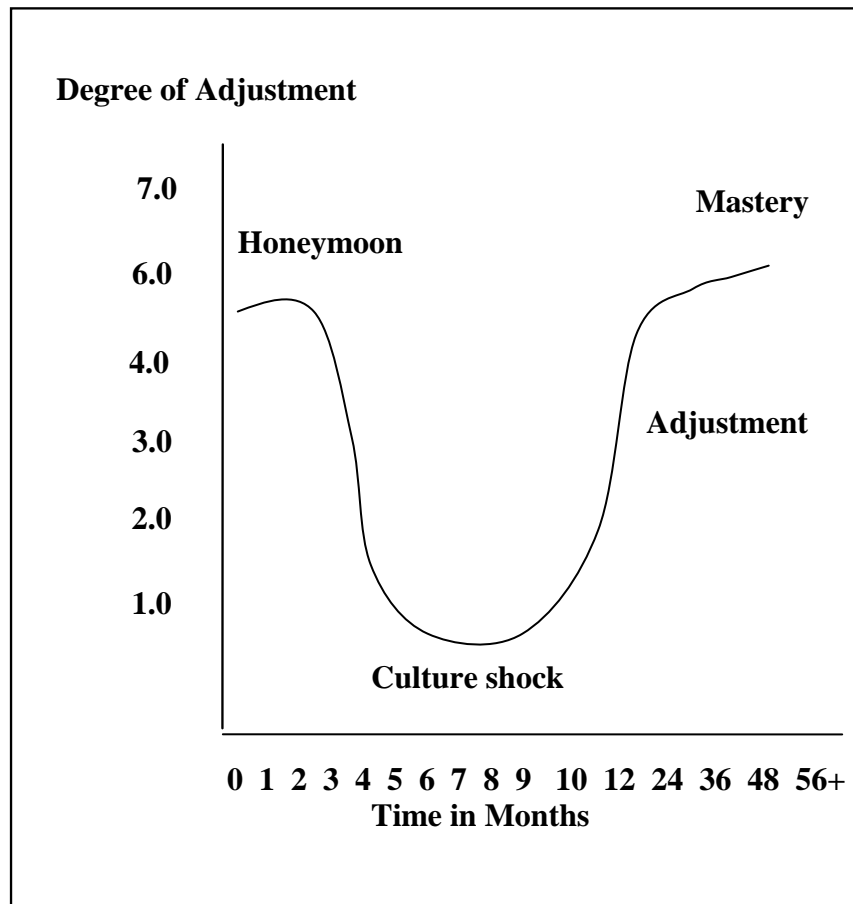
### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that forms the basis of the present study. It constitutes a review of the past literature on U-Curve Theory of Adjustment, the framework of repatriation adjustment, repatriates' adjustment, self-efficacy, role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, role novelty, social support, and culture novelty. Next, this chapter depicts the theoretical framework of the present study and the formulation of hypotheses. Finally, it provides a summary of the chapter discussion and an overview of the subsequent chapter.

#### **2.2 The U-Curve Theory of Adjustment**

The phenomenon of “culture shock” is largely a set of negative affective reactions to be faced by the individuals in a new and foreign environment (Torbiorn, 1982). One of the earliest studies on repatriation was carried out by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) as cited in Hammer et al. (1998). They argued that the cross-cultural adjustment process leads to a U-shaped curve of adjustment model (Figure 2.1). The model can also be applied to repatriation adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Returning managers often lack current understanding of the home country and the process of reducing uncertainty is the most important aspect of repatriation adjustment (Harvey, 1989; Adler, 2002). Based on these theoretical arguments of uncertainty reduction, one would expect that, in general, factors that reduce uncertainty would facilitate repatriates' adjustment while factors that increase uncertainty would inhibit adjustment.



*Figure 2.1. The U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment.*  
Source: Black and Mendenhall (1991)

According to Black and Mendenhall (1991), The U-Curve Theory of Adjustment has been classified in terms of four phases of adjustment. The first phase is referred to as the honeymoon phase and could range from two weeks to the first couple of months. During this phase, much of what is different in the new environment is viewed as “interesting” and “exciting”. Then, it is followed by culture shock/disillusionment phase. During this phase, the individual must deal with the new environment on a daily basis. Meanwhile, the novelties in the new environment and the lack of sufficient understanding of them and their relationship to appropriate and inappropriate behavior leads to affective reactions such as anxiety and frustration, which are common indicators of culture shock (Adler, 1986). The third phase is often termed as the adjustment phase. It is where individual feel comfortable and gradually

accept the new culture and the ability to “fit in” over time. Scholars have estimated that it takes approximately a year to a year-and-a-half for full repatriation adjustment (Adler, 1986). The final phase is the mastery phase where repatriates possess the ability to function and live effectively in their home country.

Thus, we would argue that repatriates who just returned home would face the same u-shape of adjustment. That is, repatriates may feel happy upon returning home. However, the phase will fade and repatriates start to realize the difference between home and host country and start not to like few things. As time goes by, repatriates will slowly adjust to the home country situation. This of course, will take time to reach this period.

### **2.3 The Framework of Repatriation Adjustment**

Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) have developed a theoretical model of international adjustment. The proposed model will help to understand the adjustment challenges expatriates face during their international assignment. In this framework, adjustment has been divided into three facets--adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with home nationals, and adjustment to the general environment and culture (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Then, the model is applied to repatriation adjustment since both adjustment situations contain similar aspects to which an expatriate has to adjust (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002).

Later, the framework of repatriation adjustment was developed by Black et al. (1992b) concerning the general categories of antecedent variables. The first category is the individual variables. Variables that are a function of individual attitudes, values, needs, or characteristics would be grouped in this category. The second category is the job variables. Variables that are related to the tasks and characteristics of the

individual's job would be classified in this category. The third category is the organizational variables. Variables that are related to the organization and its policy and practices would be placed in this category. The final category is the non-work variables. Variables that are traditionally outside the work and organizational domain such as the family and the general environment would be grouped in this fourth category.

## **2.4 Repatriates' Adjustment**

This section will discuss repatriates' adjustment, that is, the dependent variable of the present study. One of the primary theoretical processes related to adjustment is the reduction of uncertainty (Black, 1988). Adjustment is a subjective/psychological state and it refers to changes which individuals actively engender or passively accept in order to achieve or maintain satisfactory states within themselves (Torbiorn, 1982). Cross-cultural adjustment, in turn, has been conceptualized as the degree of psychological adjustment experienced by the individual or the degree of comfort, familiarity, and ease that the individual feels toward the new environment (Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

Returning expatriates must adjust to their jobs in their home country. In addition, they must adjust on a full-time and broad basis to interact with home nationals, and at the same time, they must adjust to the general non-work environment of their home country. Although it may seem that adjustment to home country may be relatively simple, scholars and expatriates tend to make these different facets of adjustment less relevant during repatriation. Adler (1981) found that most expatriates had more difficulty with adjusting back to their home country than they did adjusting to the foreign country. This suggests that repatriates' adjustment is also a cross-



cultural adjustment process. That is to say that cross-cultural adjustment involves moving from a culture in which one currently resides to a different culture in which one has never resided or has not resided for some period of time (Black & Gregersen, 1991). From this theoretical perspective, one would expect that repatriates' adjustment to be as multifaceted as other cross-cultural adjustment. Furthermore, we would expect that past measures of cross-cultural adjustment with minor wording modifications would be a reliable measure of repatriates' adjustment as well.

The term repatriation adjustment has been used as general repatriation adjustment as though the construct was unidimensional (Black & Gregersen, 1991). In addition, they mentioned that, most scholars in the past have indeed treated both cross-cultural and repatriates' adjustment as unidimensional constructs. However, there is at least preliminary evidence that cross-cultural adjustment is a multifaceted phenomenon. Black (1988) and more particularly Black and Stephens (1989) found evidence to suggest that the expatriate's adjustment consists of (1) adjustment to the job, (2) adjustment to interact with host nationals, and (3) adjustment to the general non-work environment. There are researchers that categorized facets of adjustment in terms of psychological adjustment and socio cultural adjustment (Armes & Ward, 1989; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000).

In the present study, indicators of repatriates' adjustment are psychological well-being, socio-cultural re-adjustment, and work re-adjustment is included. Psychological well-being or satisfaction is related to the ability to "fit in," to acquire culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects to the host environment (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Accordingly, Ward (1996) as cited in Ward and Kennedy (1999) argued that psychological adjustment can be best understood in terms of a stress and coping framework. In addition, psychological adjustment,

defined in terms of psychological and emotional well-being, is broadly affected by personality, life changes, coping styles, and social support. For examples, psychological adjustment has been associated with personal flexibility, internal locus of control, relationship satisfaction, approach-oriented coping styles, and use of humor (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). However, Segall et al. (1999) refers psychological adjustment as internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction.

Socio-cultural re-adjustment, by contrast, refers to external psychological outcomes that link individuals to their new context such as the ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of family life, work and school (Segall et al., 1999). Ward and Kennedy (1999) defined it in terms of behavioral competence, it is more strongly influenced by factors underpinning culture learning and social skills acquisition.

The third indicator of repatriation adjustment is work re-adjustment. Work re-adjustment involves the re-adaptation to new job tasks, work roles, and new work environment (Palthe, 2004). Work re-adjustment is aided by similarities in procedures, policies, and task requirements between the host subsidiary abroad and company in the home country (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999). In addition, Lueke and Svyantek (2000) highlighted that work adjustment include adjustment to job responsibilities, supervision, and performance expectations.

Next, the following sections will examine the independent variables of the present study. The independent variables are self-efficacy, role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, role novelty, social support, and culture novelty.

## **2.5 Individual Variable**

Palthe (2004) stated that although several of individual factors may be related to the process of adjustment, yet largely ignored factor in the cross-cultural adjustment literature is self-efficacy. Several literatures pertaining to this variable will be discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1977) proposed self-efficacy as a concept that may reflect an individual's ability to adjust in foreign environment. A study carried out by Harrison, Chadwick, and Scales (1996) demonstrated the relationship between self-efficacy and the three faceted of cross-cultural adjustment namely general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment. Results of Harrison et al. (1996) showed that self-efficacy had a significant positive correlation with work adjustment and interaction adjustment but not general adjustment.

A reviewed by Gist and Mitchell (1992) indicated that self-efficacy is associated with job performance (Barling & Beattie, 1983), productivity (Taylor, Locke, Lee, & Gist, 1984), coping with stress (Stumpf, Brief, & Hartman, 1987), career choice (Lent, Brown, & Larken, 1987), learning and achievement (Campbell & Hackett, 1986; Wood & Locke, 1987), and adaptability (Hill, Smith, & Mann, 1987).

Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to persist in exhibiting new behaviors, and therefore have greater opportunities for receiving feedback about their acquired skills than those with low self-efficacy (Black et al., 1991). Thus, we believe that repatriates with high levels of self-efficacy have high ability to overcome obstacles, take on challenges, and cope with uncertainty.

Next, we are going to discuss on another independent variable, that is, job variables.

## **2.6 Job Variables**

Job variables refer to specific set of tasks and duties performed by a given individual. Work role transition research in particular has focused on several job variables that are important in work adjustment—these are role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty (Andreason, 2003). Thus, we want to examine the relationship between these variables and repatriates' adjustment.

### **2.6.1 Role Clarity**

Role clarity refers to the level of assurance surrounding role anticipation (Palthe, 2004). Role clarity can enhance a sense of responsibility and can increase organizational commitment (Gregersen & Black, 1992; King & King, 1990; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Black and Gregersen (1991) argued that role clarity is an important factor contributing repatriation process. General theory and research on adjustment suggested that role clarity may reduce the uncertainty associated with the work situation (Black, 1988; Nicholson, 1984; Pinder & Schroader, 1987). Apart from that, Gregersen (1992) argued that if repatriates do not clearly knowing what are expected of them upon returning home, they may find it difficult to develop an action-oriented sense of responsibilities. It leads to a negative relationship between role ambiguity and commitment, or conversely, a positive relationship between role clarity and commitment after repatriation (Gregersen & Black, 1996).

### **2.6.2 *Role Conflict***

Role conflict is defined as the dimensions of congruency-incongruency or compatibility-incompatibility in the role requirements (Rizzo et al., 1970). When an individual's perceptions of what is expected of him/ her in the new work role conflict with his/her understanding, the individual is less able to decide which of these perceptions to ignore and which to take notice of (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002). Black (1994) found the connection between role conflict and interaction adjustment. However, in two other studies by Black and Gregersen (1991) and Gregersen and Stroh (1997), no significant correlations was found between role conflict and the three facets of cultural adjustment that is work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and interaction adjustment. Consequently, one can assume that the greater the role conflict, the greater the uncertainties that repatriates have to face (Black, 1988; Black et al., 1992b).

### **2.6.3 *Role Discretion***

Intercultural adjustment theorists (Black, 1988; Nicholson, 1984) suggested that role discretion allows individuals to adjust to their work role by changing the role to fit the individual. Thus, making it easier for the individuals to utilize past, familiar behaviors. In Black et al.'s (1992b) theoretical framework of repatriation adjustment, role discretion facilitates both behavioral and predictive control. Greater role discretion makes it easier for individuals to utilize past behavior patterns, which, in turn, reduces some of the uncertainty in the new situation and consequently, facilitates adjustment in the novel setting (Black et al., 1991).

Role discretion is one key job that correlates with commitment among Americans (Gregersen & Black, 1992) and Japanese (Near, 1989; Gregersen & Black,

1996). The more discretion an individual has about what, when, and how to do work, the greater the person feels a sense of responsibility for those activities (Stewart, 1982). Furthermore, role discretion is important during repatriation because many expatriates return from international assignments having held positions overseas with high levels of autonomy and discretion (Adler, 1991; Black, 1988; Feldman et al., 1993; Harvey, 1989). Thus, role discretion is said to have a positive relationship with repatriates' adjustment.

#### **2.6.4 *Role Novelty***

Role novelty involves the degree to which the current role is different from past roles (Black, 1988). Black (1988) noted that if the new position is different from the previous position, a repatriate may experience greater feelings of uncertainty and unpredictability. Pinder and Schroeder (1987) found that the greater the difference between the new and previous position, the longer it takes for the person to reach a level of proficiency after a domestic transfer. A study carried out by Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley (1999) found that the higher the degree of role novelty, the lower the degree of work and general adjustment. Interestingly, role novelty has also been suggested as a relevant antecedent variable in repatriates' adjustment situation (Feldman, 1991). Consequently, repatriates experience greater adjustment if they are less role novelty of their jobs.

### **2.7 *Organizational Variable***

Eventhough there are many organizational variables that may contribute to repatriates' adjustment, the present study will focus only social support.

### **2.7.1 Social Support**

As defined by Shumaker and Brownell (1984)(as cited from Ali, et. al., 2003, p.55), social support is defined as “an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient”. They argued that people in support are physically and emotionally healthier than non-supported people. In addition, Tsang (2001) mentioned that help received from other people when encountering difficulties in coping with a new environment facilitates the individual to adjust to the environment.

However, Cohen and Wills (1985) defined social support of co-workers and superiors in terms of sources and quality of helping that act as a stress reduction of work re-adjustment among repatriates. The importance of social support for successful adaptation has been well documented in the literature (Adelman, 1988; Church, 1982; Golding & Burnam, 1990; Ali, et al., 2003; Ali, 2003). Thus, social support seems seriously needed by the repatriate in order to adapt and adjust effectively to the new surroundings.

## **2.8 Non-work Variable**

Non-work variable is the final category of variable relevant to repatriates' adjustment. We will include culture novelty in order to examine the antecedent of repatriates' adjustment among Malaysian repatriates.

### **2.8.1 Culture Novelty**

The first non-work factor that seems to be important in repatriates' adjustment is the dissimilarity between the home country and the host country from which the expatriate is returning. Culture novelty also known as 'cultural distance' (Church,

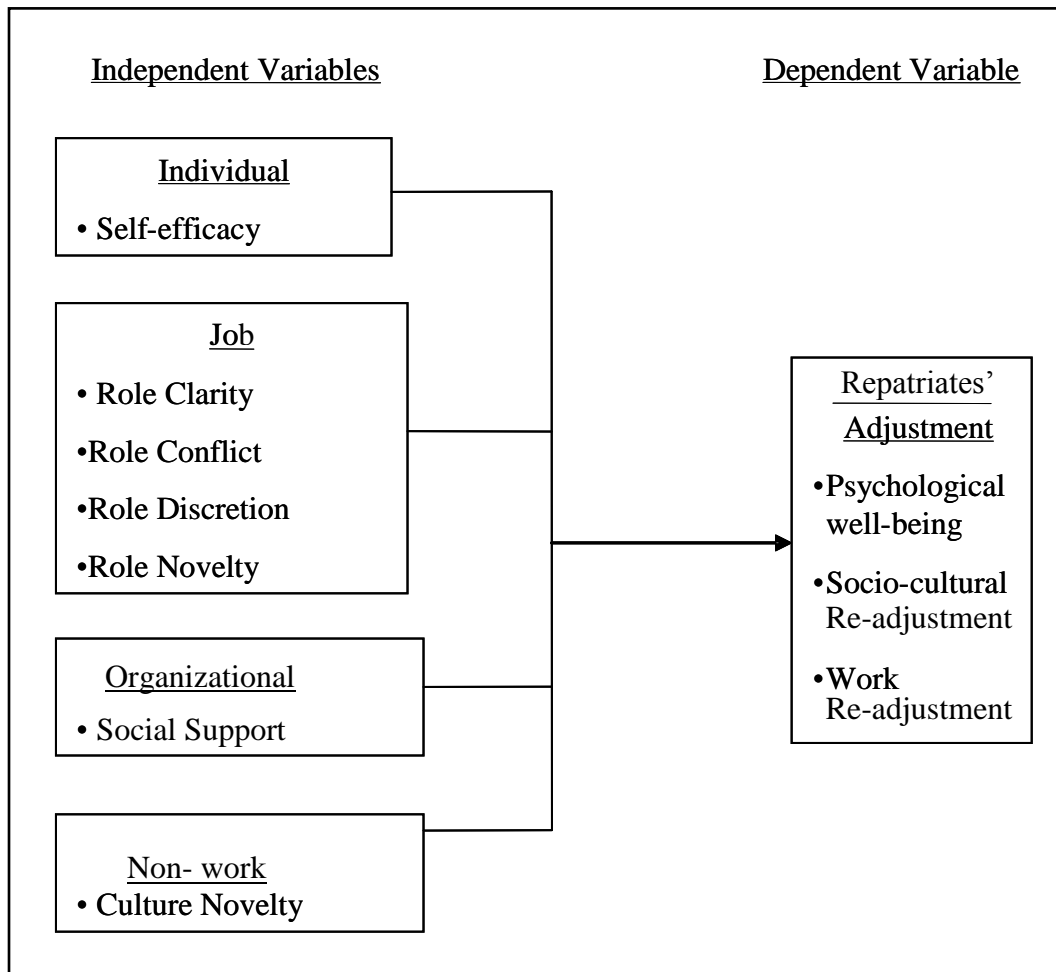
1982) or ‘culture toughness’ (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). The more different the host-country culture is from the home country culture, the more difficult the adjustment process is likely to be (Parker & McEvoy, 1993). Consequently, the more difficult will it be for repatriates to adjust to their home country culture. Moreover, because many elements of a work environment are similar across geographic locations, we would expect the comparative novelty of the host and home country cultures to have its greatest relevance with respect to repatriates’ adjustment to interacting with locals and to general adjustment, rather than to adjustment at work.

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework**

Based on the discussion above and review from past literature, a theoretical framework of the present study is presented in Figure 2.2. This theoretical framework for repatriates’ adjustment is an adaptation from Black et al. (1991) and also Black et al. (1992b). The reason of adapting this model is to examine the determinants that may influence the repatriates’ adjustment among Malaysian repatriates.

Black et al. (1991) and Black et al. (1992b) focused on interaction adjustment, general adjustment, and work adjustment on their elements of adjustment. The present study is focusing on psychological well-being, socio-cultural re-adjustment, and work re-adjustment. In addition, the present study makes use of the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment that was applied by Ali et al. (2003) and Black and Gregersen (1991). Besides, the present study adds self-efficacy and social support as the additional determinants of repatriates’ adjustment since they were not covered by the past researchers in the repatriation adjustment literature. The present study also includes role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, role novelty, and culture novelty as our independent variables.





*Figure 2.2. The Framework of Repatriates' Adjustment.*  
An adaptation from Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) and Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992b).

## 2.10 Hypotheses

Past studies suggest that individual variable (self efficacy), job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty), organizational variable (social support), and non-work variable (culture novelty) to some extent will influence repatriates' adjustment.

### *2.10.1 The Relationship between Individual Variable and Repatriates' Adjustment*

Theoretically, one of the most powerful individual variable that determine persistence in effort is an individual's belief in control or self-efficacy (Bandura,

1977). Thus, we can argue that the greater the individuals' beliefs that they are capable of gaining behavioral control and adjusting to home country, organization, and job, the longer they persist at attempting to make behavioral adjustments and the greater the probability of success in that effort. Harrison et al. (1996) study indicated the link between self-efficacy and the three facets to cross-cultural adjustments. The study by Harrison et al. (1996) found that expatriates with high self-efficacy had greater levels of general, interaction, and work adjustment compared to those who had lower levels of self-efficacy. However, Palthe (2004) found no support for the relationship between self-efficacy and work adjustment. In order to test this relationship, it is hypothesized that:

*H1: Individual variable (self-efficacy) will be related to repatriates' adjustment.*

*H1a: Self-efficacy will be positively related to psychological well-being.*

*H1b: Self-efficacy will be positively related to socio-cultural re-adjustment.*

*H1c: Self-efficacy will be positively related to work re-adjustment.*

### **2.10.2 The Relationship between Job Variables and Repatriates' Adjustment**

Role clarity concerns the extent to which an individual knows what is expected of him/her job (Rizzo et al., 1970). Consequently, one would expect that role clarity would reduce uncertainty associated with the work situation, and thus, would facilitate repatriation work adjustment for the repatriate (Black et al., 1992b). In addition, Black and Gregersen (1991) found that role clarity had a significant relationship with repatriates' work adjustment. Gregersen and Stroh (1997), in their study among Finnish repatriates found that role clarity was significantly and positively correlated to work adjustment.

In contrast, one would expect that role conflict would increase the uncertainty associated with a new job in the home country (Black, 1988). When the individual's perceptions of what is expected of him/her is different from his/her own understanding, the individual is less able to decide which of these perceptions to ignore and which to take notice of. Hence, one can assume that the greater the role conflict is, the greater the hindrances for a successful repatriation process (Black, 1988; Black et al, 1992b). Thus, in the present study, it is expected that this connection will appear.

The lower the role discretion, the greater the level of uncertainty, and thus, a repatriate may be facing severe adjustment challenges (Feldman, 1991). Gregersen and Black (1996) found that role discretion among Japanese repatriates showed a positive trend relationship with organizational commitment upon their return to home country. Meanwhile, Black and Gregersen (1991) in their study among Americans repatriates found that role discretion had a significant relationship with work adjustment. This assumption is supported by other empirical studies, for examples Black (1994), Gregersen and Stroh (1997), and Palthe (2004). Apart from that, Black and Gregersen (1991) mentioned that individuals in jobs with high role discretion adjust better cross-culturally. Thus, we would expect that role discretion would facilitate work re-adjustment for repatriates.

Suutari and Valimaa (2002) conducted a study on the antecedents of repatriation adjustment among 79 members of Finnish repatriates, and found that role novelty did not have any significant relation with work adjustment. Black's (1988) study also did not support the relationship between role novelty and work adjustment. However, Shaffer et al. (1999) found that expatriates with high role novelty was a significant predictor of lower expatriate's general and work adjustment.

Thus, it is hypothesized that:

*H2: Job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) will be related to repatriates' adjustment.*

*H2a: Role clarity will be positively related to psychological well-being.*

*H2b: Role clarity will be positively related to socio-cultural re-adjustment.*

*H2c: Role clarity will be positively related to work re-adjustment.*

*H2d: Role conflict will be negatively related to psychological well-being.*

*H2e: Role conflict will be negatively related to socio-cultural re-adjustment.*

*H2f: Role conflict will be negatively related to work re-adjustment.*

*H2g: Role discretion will be positively related to psychological well-being.*

*H2h: Role discretion will be positively related to socio-cultural re-adjustment.*

*H2i: Role discretion will be positively related to work re-adjustment.*

*H2j: Role novelty will be negatively related to psychological well-being.*

*H2k: Role novelty will be negatively related to socio-cultural re-adjustment.*

*H2l: Role novelty will be negatively related to work re-adjustment.*

### **2.10.3 Relationship between Organizational Variable and Repatriates' Adjustment**

De Ciere, Dowling, and Taylor (1991), Ali et al. (2003), and Ali (2003) found that company assistance with the relocation process was a strong predictor of psychological adjustment among of an expatriate's spouses particularly in the early stages of expatriation. Therefore, it was predicted that social support is positively related to the repatriates' adjustment, which leads to the development of the following hypotheses:

*H3: Organizational variable (social support) will be related to repatriates' adjustment.*